

Effects of Food Assistance and Nutrition Programs on Nutrition and Health: Volume I, Research Design. By William L. Hamilton of Abt Associates Inc., and Peter H. Rossi of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, for the Food and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Report No. 19-1.

Abstract

This is the first of four reports in the “Nutrition and Health Outcome Study,” which assesses the effects of USDA’s food assistance and nutrition programs on nutrition and health outcomes. This report reviews the research designs available to evaluators for assessing the effect of USDA’s food assistance and nutrition programs. The random assignment experiment is the “gold standard” design for such an evaluation. Where random assignment is impossible, quasi-experimental designs are used to infer what would have happened to program participants if the program had not existed. Eight types of quasi-experimental design are identified as having been used in evaluations of food assistance and nutrition programs, although none can guarantee unbiased estimates of program impacts.

Keywords: USDA’s food assistance and nutrition programs, nutrition and health outcomes, research design.

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